

# The Bridge On The N. & T.

**D**ESPITE the fact that the business district of the city was deserted, the lights still flamed in Grannet's office, and Grannet was there, impatient, eager and determined.

He was faultlessly dressed in evening attire, while the man who sat opposite, smoking his pipe, was in well-worn khaki from collar to calves, where thick, heavy hiking boots finished the roughness of his costume.

Between them on the desk lay a mass of documents, maps, contracts, specifications and reports. Over one of the maps young Grannet was poring.

With one strong hand he hauled at his hair. The other traced a crooked centipede of ink, boldly drawn upon the vellum and labelled "N. & T. R. R." It represented a railroad in the mountains of the west that Grannet and his associates were building. Another winding centipede lay fairly under his elbow, its trend, like that of the first, towards a star representing a town.

"Yes, we've got them nailed to the desert," he presently remarked. "They have still to complete a mile of filling, five miles of track and to get and bolt down their bridge across the Rockwell river. We have six miles of track to spike in place and our bridge to fling across the stream." He suddenly rose, striking his fist in the palm of his hand. "I'm going to beat Jawsard to a pulp on this, C. B., if it drains me to the marrow of my bones!"

C. B. was the man across the table. The rest of his name was Rouk. He had engineered the road from start to present status. He had just arrived from the field of work, without so much as a change of outer garments, in response to the needs of the hour.

"Jawsard pulps like rubber," he answered drawlingly. "Just now we need less thought on him and more about the bridge."

Grannet began to pace the room.

"Damn the Kenyon company anyhow!" he detonated suddenly. "What do they mean by all this silence about that little strip of steel? What's a toy bridge like that to them? It ought to be ready for shipment now! It must be ready! It was promised on board the cars a week ago! They know the importance of the fight I've got with Jawsard! They know what it means to the road that gets in first at Thunderhollow! They know our piers are standing there finished and waiting! And not a word for days, in reply to all my wires and letters! What do you make of such a situation?"

C. B. answered with a query.

"Where has Jawsard ordered his bridge?"

"I don't know. I only know he tried, as we did, with the Spikemans, the Buxtons and the Reamer works, and got the same reply—too busy with larger, more important work to turn out this hurry-up order. What he did after that is more than I can tell."

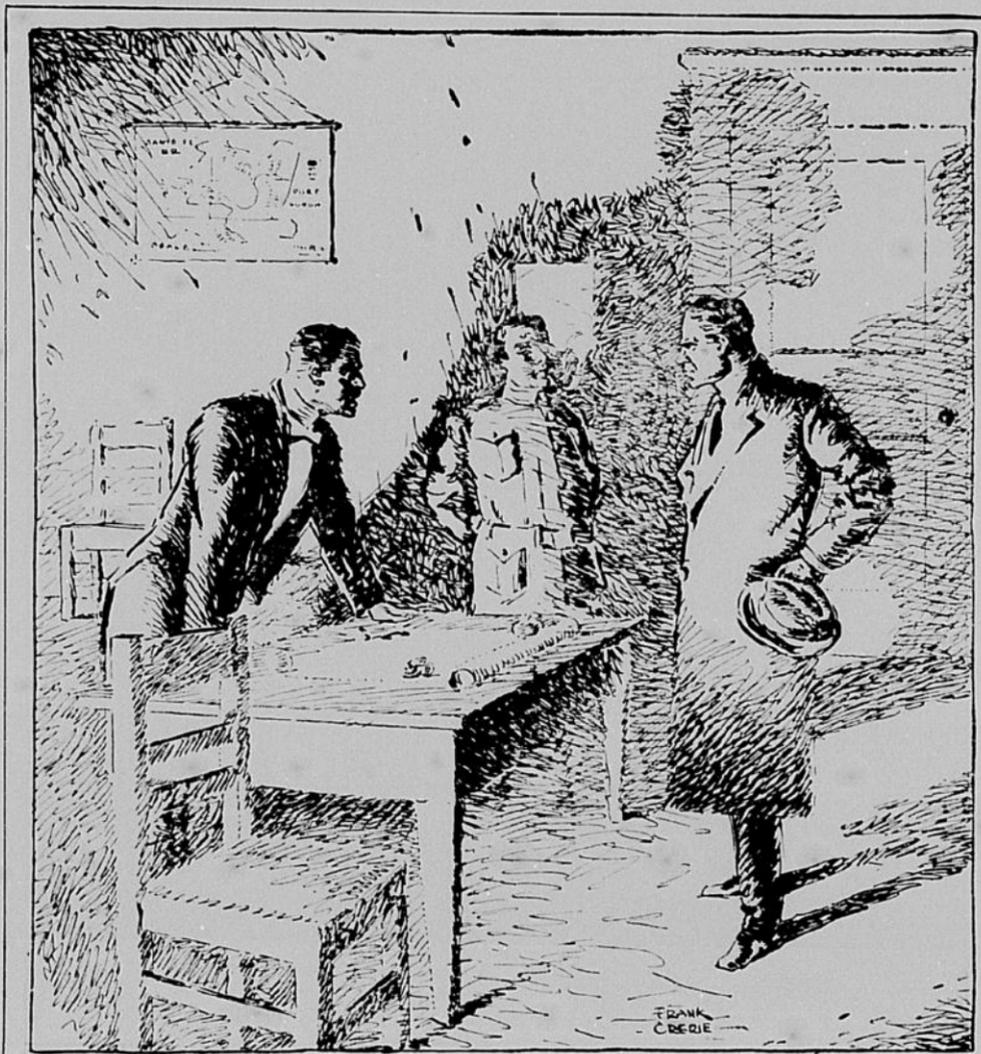
C. B. was smoking, and musing.

"If he got his span across his piers a week ahead of ours—he'd take the trick."

"Every trick—every trick—every trick!" cried Grannet fiercely. "If I thought the Kenyons would fail me now—but they can't—I'm certain of that. Nevertheless, I've dreamed wild dreams of throwing a temporary bridge across with giant Oregon timbers. I've thought of floating down those monster barges at the forks and making a sort of pontoon. I've thought of the craziest schemes on earth to get the first train into Thunderhollow. And I'll get it in and nail those contracts, C. B., if I have to carry my engines over the river on my back, a piece at a time, and drag in the cars with my hands!"

C. B. was older than his chief. He smoked on placidly.

"That's almost the threat that Jawsard made—



"The bridge is gone! It was sold to Jawsard!"

By Philip Verrill Mighels

Author of "Bruvver Jim's Bab," Etc.

and he's proved he's a resourceful man."

"He is. He has proved himself also a trickster, a liar and a thoroughly unscrupulous political charlatan!"

"He's worth downing."

"Hub!" The exclamation told it all—Grannet's exultation in the struggle. "And I'll down him! I've nearly got him now! He's a man who will halt at nothing to achieve his ends. He only tackled this railroad game against me to add to his powers of corruption—that and because it is I at the head of the N. & T."

"I wonder, C. B., if you realize all this business means—all the fortunes, careers and vital issues at stake on the final outcome of this fight of mine to beat Jawsard through to Thunderhollow? Look at that, and that—and these contracts here! Look at this from the president, this from the governor, this from the country's biggest bankers!" He tossed the documents over the desk, a flock on paper wings, and once more consulted his watch. "And to think that the Kenyons, after all their promises—Here it is going on half-past eight. Sturman could be back by this and he hasn't even wired!"

**C**ALMLY the engineer was glancing through the papers.

"I'm glad I knew nothing of all this stake that hangs on our efforts," he presently observed. "It might have made me nervous. Well, it all rests tonight on the bridge. If we find it's loaded and on the way—"

A knock on the door and then the entrance of a quiet young clerk interrupted the engineer's speech. The clerk addressed himself to Grannet.

"You asked me to remind you, sir, a little after eight, that you are expected—"

"Thank you—all right," said Grannet. And left there once more with the placid C. B., he reflected impatiently on all the affairs that had kept him away from Eileen, these many weeks, to the jeopardy of all his heart's desires. He could not neglect tonight's appointment, and yet he felt he could not leave without a word from Sturman.

Once more he was pacing the length of the room when Sturman abruptly appeared.

He came in unannounced. He was a thin, alert

and nervous individual, keen as the edge of a knife.

Grannet had turned with one of his leopard-like movements.

"Well," he said. "Well, Sturman, here at last. Did you think you could beat a wire? What's in the wind, man? What about the bridge?"

"You haven't had my wire?" inquired Sturman, jerkily. "I filed it this morning at ten. The bridge is gone. It was sold to Jawsard ten days ago, and was shipped last week—last Monday."

Rouk arose. Grannet stared at his messenger in utter unbelief.

"Jawsard—bought that bridge—my bridge? It's been shipped to Jawsard—not to me? But, man, such a breach of contract—the law—the damages—By the gods, do you hear, C. B.? Do you hear what he says? That bridge was made for me—for me! It's mine, by heavens, and I'll snatch it back—"

"It went by express, through car," interrupted Sturman. "It's already there, delivered at the piers and probably going into place."

The utter futility of all the law, the rights of contract, the damages assessable against the Kenyon company, the formerly possible injunctions, now too late—all impotent, mere mockeries, with need for a bridge across a narrow stream the one and only element in all his battle—all this crashed in upon Grannet's mind with

an almost overwhelming force. He saw the methods of Jawsard all too plainly—the work of a pirate of the money world who

could easily figure to pay, not only the price of corruption and bribery, but damages, fabulous charges for expressing the bridge, and everything else, to defeat an all but triumphant rival and wrest from his grasp the millions for which they were racing their roads.

**H**IS face was white; his lips were compressed. He faced the two men silently while his friends went sick with defeat. A maelstrom swept his mind confusingly, everything heaving in an endless circle and back upon itself. It was useless to rage, useless to denounce, useless to tatter his mental mechanism with anger.

In all the derangement of his plans and hopes—the ruin of his victory—the one thought uppermost in his brain was strangely enough of Eileen. It was what she would think and what she would say that rose to the surface of his turmoil now.

When he spoke again his mind had made a thousand revolutions.

"Did you say you filed a wire to me at ten o'clock this morning?"

"Ten two," said Sturman, punctiliously. "It was evidently stopped."

Grannet nodded. "Jawsard doubtless read it in my stead. By halting it there in Coketon he gained nearly one day more." He crossed to the rack, took down his coat and silently put it on. It was not so much an action done in calm as the mere automatic response to a prompting of his mind. He was due at Eileen's. To stand here facing his men and defeat was enough to drive him mad.

**N**EVER in all their acquaintance had Eileen seemed so wrought upon as now. Grannet had never seen her more magnificent.

She, too, was tall, almost as tall as the man who stood there before her. He had never thought her more superb, more regal than tonight. Her beauty was heightened by the tense indignation now flaming so hotly in her eyes.

They made a splendid pair, she and Grannet, face to face among the leaves and exotics of the orchidry, as the arched place of crystal had been termed. Grannet was as straight as an Indian, a clean-cut, finished product of the age of steel. His countenance, chiseled, hard and smooth, was strong and compellingly fine.